

No new investigation of

Grand jury panel rejects bid by trio contending

MEMPHIS, Tenn. — A grand jury panel has rejected a request to open a new investigation into the 1968 assassination here of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.

For the past month, a panel of three people on the Shelby County grand jury considered evidence submitted by a Memphis lawyer and two private investigators who contended that the slaying of the civil rights leader was a result of a conspiracy.

The lawyer, Jack McNeil, and the two detectives, Kenneth Herman and John Billings, said they hoped that the information, which they had collected during the past 10 years, would result in an indictment of Loyd Jowers, who owned a restaurant beneath the boarding house window where James Earl Ray is believed to have shot and killed King on April 4, 1968.

Jowers said on the ABC pro-

gram *Prime Time Live* in 1963 that he had been paid by a Memphis grocery store owner to hire someone to kill King. Jowers asked for immunity from prosecution to tell more, but it has not been granted.

The grocery store owner, Frank Liberto, is dead. But a transcript of an FBI interview with Liberto in 1968 and a videotape of the ABC broadcast were part of information submit-

King assassination

conspiracy was behind 1968 killing

ted to the grand jury panel.

The foreman of the grand jury, Herbert Robinson Jr., said in a letter to McNeil on Thursday that his panel would not recommend that the full, 12-member grand jury look into the conspiracy theory because "there was not credible evidence presented in this matter to warrant an investigation by the grand jury."

On Friday, Robinson said: "If you're going to prosecute an indi-

vidual, you have to prove guilt beyond a reasonable doubt, and their evidence did not meet that standard. It was not even close."

McNeil, who briefly worked on recent efforts to have Ray's 1969 guilty plea thrown out but was dismissed by the convicted assassin this year, said on Friday, "It is so difficult to rewrite history."

"The accepted legal theory that James Earl Ray worked alone is not credible to at least 75

percent of the American people now, and I think James Earl Ray really had no significant role in the assassination," McNeil said.

John Campbell, the assistant district attorney who has overseen the James Earl Ray case for the past four years, was questioned by the grand jury panel last week as well.

Campbell said he thought that the panel had rejected the conspiracy argument because it was based on statements that have changed over the years.